

Traffic Safety Facts

Laws

January 2006

Bicycle Helmet Use Laws

Background

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) supports the enactment of bicycle helmet use laws. Bicycle helmets offer bicyclists the best protection from head injuries resulting from bicycle crashes, and bicycle helmet laws have been proven effective in increasing bicycle helmet use.

Key Facts

- More than 49,000 bicyclists have died in traffic crashes in the United States since 1932, the first year that bicycle fatality estimates were recorded.
- In 2004, 725 bicyclists were killed and an additional 41,000 were injured in traffic crashes. Children 14 and younger accounted for 130 fatalities (18%), making this one of the most frequent causes of injury-related death for young children.
- In 2004, 58 percent of bicyclists killed and 78 percent of bicyclists injured were between the ages of 5 and 44.
- In 2004, 87 percent of bicyclists killed and 76 percent of those injured were males.
- In 2004, the average age of bicyclists killed was 38.7 years, and the average age of those injured was 28.6 years.
- In 2004, an estimated 534,883 bicycle-related injuries were treated in U.S. hospital emergency rooms. An estimated 297,728 were children younger than 15, and an estimated 34,072 were 18 to 22 years old.
- Universal bicycle helmet use by children 4 to 15 would prevent 39,000 to 45,000 head injuries, and 18,000 to 55,000 scalp and face injuries annually.
- Bicycle helmets are 85 to 88 percent effective in mitigating head and brain injuries, making the use of helmets the single most effective way to reduce head injuries and fatalities resulting from bicycle crashes.
- Despite the fact that nearly 70 percent of all fatal bicycle crashes involve head injuries, only about 20 to 25 percent of all bicyclists wear bicycle helmets.
- As with safety belts, child safety seats, and motorcycle helmets, enacting laws requiring the use of bicycle helmets, along with education and high-visibility

enforcement, is likely to be the most promising way to increase bicycle helmet use.

Legislative Status

- The first bicycle helmet law was passed in California in 1986 and became effective in 1987. This law was amended in 1994 to cover everyone under 18.
- As of January 2006, 20 States, the District of Columbia, and at least 148 municipal localities have enacted age-specific bicycle helmet laws. Most of these laws cover bicyclists under 16.
- Thirteen States have no State or local helmet laws at all (Arkansas, Colorado, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, Mississippi, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Carolina, Utah, Vermont, and Wyoming).
- The Child Safety Protection Act of 1994 (Public Law 103-267) required the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) to develop a mandatory bicycle helmet standard.
- On March 10, 1998, the CPSC published a final rule establishing 16 CFR Part 1203, Safety Standard for Bicycle Helmets, which applies to bicycle helmets manufactured after March 10, 1999. The interim mandatory standard that went into effect on March 17, 1995, continues to apply

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to helmets manufactured between March 17, 1995, and March 10, 1999. The standard mandates several performance requirements including:

▲ **Impact protection in a crash:**

The standard establishes a performance test to ensure that helmets adequately protect the head in a collision or a fall.

▲ **Children's helmets and head coverage:** The standard specifies an increased area of head coverage for children ages 1 to 5.

▲ **Chinstrap strength:** The standard establishes a performance test to measure chinstrap strength to prevent breakage or excessive elongation of the strap during a crash.

▲ **Helmet Stability:** The standard specifies a test procedure and requirement for rolling off a head during a collision or fall.

▲ **Peripheral Vision:** The standard requires that a helmet allow a field of vision of 105 degrees to both the left and right of straight ahead.

In addition, helmets meeting the standard must have labels indicating that they comply with CPSC requirements.

Cost Savings

- The estimated annual cost of bicycle-related injuries and deaths (for all ages) is \$8 billion.
- Bicycle-related head injuries are expensive because these injuries can endure and may

require treatment for a lifetime.

- Every dollar spent on bicycle helmets saves society \$30 in indirect medical costs and other costs.

Research

Under contract to NHTSA, Dunlap and Associates, Inc., of Stamford, Connecticut, is examining the effect of bicycle helmet laws and associated law enforcement activities on the rate of helmet use and level of bicycle ridership.

References

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State Bicycle Helmet Laws: Summary*

Jurisdiction	Age	Jurisdiction	Age
Alabama	Under 16	Maryland	Under 16
California	Under 18	Massachusetts	Under 17
Connecticut	Under 16	New Jersey	Under 17
Delaware	Under 16	New Hampshire	Under 16
District of Columbia	Under 16	New York	Under 14
Florida	Under 16	North Carolina	Under 16
Georgia	Under 16	Oregon	Under 16
Hawaii	Under 16	Pennsylvania	Under 12
Louisiana	Under 12	Rhode Island	Under 16
Maine	Under 16	Tennessee	Under 16
		West Virginia	Under 15

Source: BHSI**

*Check with your State Bicycle Pedestrian Coordinators for county, city and local bicycle helmet laws.

***Helmet Laws for Bicycle Riders: A Summary*. Bicycle Helmet Safety Institute, Retrieved from the Internet at www.helmets.org, 2000.



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